

DEMOB *Rwanda*

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**Vocational skills confront
jobs challenge among
ex-combatants, dependents**

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Nyagatare Transit Center put in place hand washing facilities as one of the measures to prevent COVID-19 spread.

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Editorial

UNDP, UN Women project achieved its goals, time to safeguard

On September 30, a donor-funded project designed to support reintegration of ex-FDLR combatants under “Phase 65” and their dependents repatriated from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) wound up after successful implementation.

The project was implemented through the partnership of Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) with UNDP and UN Women.

The beneficiaries included 1,634 persons repatriated in November 2018 including 554 ex-combatants, 249 women and 832 children.

The project addressed a long-term social and economic reintegration of the beneficiaries through reintegration grants, medical support, vocational skills training and income generating activities to help the beneficiaries integrate successfully in their communities.

The initiative contributes to peace building, and conflict transformation in the region.

The beneficiaries were also supported to become integral part of existing cooperatives and to access community

services, such education, health care, psycho-social counseling and access to documentation at the same level as other community members.

The RDRC recently visited the beneficiaries across the country and according to various testimonies; the project is tremendously transforming people’s lives through livestock and commercial farming.

Ex-combatants have been able to construct their own houses; they have formed cooperatives, thanks to the project’s funding.

RDRC believes the beneficiaries were empowered enough to run their enterprises efficiently going forward.

The Commission cannot thank UNDP and UN Women enough for their support.

Given the security concerns presented by FDLR, as a significant destabilizing factor in the Great Lakes region, the Government of Rwanda has committed to continue DDR support for ex-FDLR members and their dependents repatriated from DRC.

Socio economic support to ex-combatants, their dependents and the hosting communities provides the opportunity to promote social cohesion and economic revitalization as well as to generate peace dividends to entire villages and the whole country.

RDRC Chairperson implores public to play bigger role in reintegration



Ms Valerie Nyirahabineza, Chairperson of the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC)

The Chairperson of the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) called on the public to play a bigger role in efforts aimed at strengthening demobilization and reintegration of members of armed groups in the country.

In an interview, Ms Valerie Nyirahabineza warned against Rwandans taking advantage of their relatives who are in the jungles to grab their property.

Ms Nyirahabineza said some Rwandans send messages to their relatives in DRC, threatening them with arrest if they return home in order to continue occupying their property.

“The biggest challenge is with families with relatives in the DRC jungles who do not want them to return for fear of

sharing their property and other family wealth,” she said.

“These people threaten their relatives, claiming that they will be arrested over Gacaca charges if they return home. For someone who has been living outside Rwanda for such a long time, once they are fed with this misinformation, they decide to remain in the jungles.”

The commission has two major roles; to support unity and reconciliation programs among Rwandans and to restore peace and security in Rwanda and within the Great Lakes region.

Its role starts with mobilizing and sensitizing members of armed groups to return to Rwanda and get reintegrated back in their communities.

It is also in charge of demobilization

of both members of Rwanda Defense Force (RDF) as well as armed groups members from Ex-FAR, FDLR among others.

As the commission carries out its mandate we count on all Rwandans to support us in achieving our goals, Ms Nyirahabineza said.

She noted that it is vital for Rwandans still holed up in DRC jungles to return and enroll their children in schools, instead of recruiting them into armed groups.

“Those who are mature and are engaged in armed activities, I urge them to peacefully return to Rwanda, the country is ready to receive and support you to reintegrate back in communities,” she said.

Nyirahabineza talked about the genesis of RDRC, indicating it did not come out of the blue.

It was one of the recommendations reached at the 1993, Arusha-Tanzania peace talks held during the 1990 liberation war-which necessitated joining Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) forces and FAR under a unitary government.

Yet there were so many soldiers on both sides who could not all be reintegrated into a national army.

It was then concluded that those who could not be reintegrated would be demobilized.

That is how the commission came into inception in 1997.

It began by reintegrating the army and demobilizing those who were not reintegrated.

Those from armed groups are taken through pre-discharge orientation program at Mutobo DC, to facilitate their peaceful reintegration in their communities' around the country.

For RDF combatants who are demobilized, the commission offers them reinsertion training which enables them to fully reintegrate into civilian life.

"We give them some money in form of basic needs kit to enable them buy basic requirements to start a new life in their respective villages," said Ms Nyirahabineza.

"This if followed by the reintegration program to ensure they go back to their communities, working with various agencies such as the Defense Ministry."

Additionally, in villages the commission helps the ex-combatants to benefit from government programs such as Girinka, cooperatives, VUP, among others through mainstreaming and advocacy.

CHILDEX-COMBATANTS

Besides older people, RDRC also



Fode Ndiaye UN Resident representative in Rwanda hands over equipment to one of the ex-combatants who completed vocational skills training.

receives child ex-combatants who attend civic education from a specific center.

"We train them to become good citizens, teach them how to read and write and other civic training. This is because many of these children were born in the DRC jungles and what they were taught by their parents was to be good soldiers," said Ms Nyirahabineza.

"We also offer them technical training to equip them with skills to create their own jobs using the tools and equipment provided by the commission after being discharged."

ACHIEVEMENTS

RDRC data shows that over the years the commission demobilized and reintegrated over 70,062 ex-combatants and helped 13,852 of their dependents.

Of these, 45,368 are Rwanda Patriotic Army ex-combatants, 12,969 are Ex-FAR, and 11,725 from other armed groups.

On reinsertion, the commission provides financial support to ex-combatants for their basic needs. This includes Rwf120,000 for each ex-combatant reintegrated back to civilian life.

"We also facilitate family re-unification among ex-combatants because some of them return after being separated from their families back in DRC. When they return separately, we facilitate to re-unite spouses, and children. Families have been able to start a new life in Rwanda together," said Ms Nyirahabineza.

GENDER EQUALITY MAINTAINED

The commission fully respects gender equality in receiving, reintegrating and demobilizing ex-combatants, according to the Chairperson.

After receiving repatriated Rwandans, who are in most cases handed to the commission by RDF; the commission ensures that the women and girls are received by fellow women within the RDRC commission; the same applies to female ex-combatants who are repatriated from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

"This is done to ensure that special attention is given to these female ex-combatants since they have specific needs," she said.

"But there is no discrimination based on gender; both men and women are all treated and supported equally."

RDRC PARTNERS

The commission does not work in isolation, it works with other relevant government institutions and donor partners that include the UNDP and the UN Women, GIZ, JAICA among others.

Ms Nyirahabineza highlighted successful implementation of a project aimed at entrenching peace and security within the Great Lakes region.

The project, that was financed by the UNDP and UN Women focused on repatriating FDLR ex-combatants, where a total of 1653 ex-combatants and their dependents were repatriated to Rwanda.

The project concluded on September 30, 2021.

"I want to extend my sincere appreciation to the UNDP and UN Women who helped in financing the entire project," she said.

From ex-combatants to their dependents, including children and women the project worked towards finding peaceful solutions.

The project assisted some women who faced gender based violence while in the DRC to get treatment and rehabilitation.

FDLR ex-combatants were also trained and supported in establishing income generating projects.

"We recently visited them and it was noted that they have improved their standards of living through livestock and commercial agriculture. They constructed their own houses; they have formed cooperatives, thanks to funding from the UNDP and UN women," she said.

Reports indicate that positive information to the FDLR members back in the DRC is already changing their mindset to consider voluntary repatriation.

"This is a great achievement in terms of peace building and security not only in Rwanda but in the region as a whole," said the Chairperson.



The commission does not work in isolation, it works with other relevant government institutions and donor partners that include the UNDP and the UN Women, GIZ, JAICA among others.

According to her, ex-combatants play a vital role in sensitizing those still in DRC jungles to return peacefully to Rwanda by assuring them of their security upon return.

Despite end of this particular project, the commission remains committed to working with other development partners to entrench peace and security within Rwanda and the Great Lakes region, Ms Nyirahabineza said.

FUTURE PLANS

The commission plans to expand Mutobo DC as a center of excellence to provide programs not only to Rwandans but to other countries, with more programs expected to be introduced, according to the Chairperson.

"We wish ex-combatants to become a foundation for peace and security in Rwanda and the region through

providing best practices," Ms Nyirahabineza said.

The commission has been working with the foreign countries to help them establish their commissions to demobilize ex-soldiers in Central African Republic, South Sudan, Nepal, and Columbia among others.

TECHNICAL TRAINING FOR EX-COMBATANTS

Meanwhile through the just concluded peace building project the commission embarked on skills training to counter unemployment among ex-combatants.

Ex-combatants and their dependents undertake six months technical and vocational training in various trades such as tailoring, construction, welding, farming, hair dressing at various TVET schools working with the commission.

The graduates of skills training are provided the required tools to enable them create their own jobs.

"The most important thing is that the commission allowed wives, sons and daughters of ex-combatants who were old and unable to participate in the technical training as this would help such families to get out of poverty through these young people," said Ms Nyirahabineza.

"We also provide formal education to ex-combatants, their wives and children to ensure that they get the necessary skills required on the job market."

Brig. Gen. John Bagabo hails reintegration role in peace building

Brig. Gen. John Bagabo, commissioner at the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) hailed the peaceful co-existence of ex-combatants from the different armed groups in the country.

In an interview, Brig. Gen. Bagabo touched on topics from demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants to its role in peace building.

Critical for the commission is its role in fostering peace and unity that had eluded the country before the 1994 liberation struggle.

Brig. Gen. Bagabo, highlighted that Ex-FAR were integrated into Rwanda Defense Force (RDF) even when they fought each other during the liberation war.

“For other ex-combatants from FDLR, RUD Urunana and CNRD have been reintegrated back to the communities. If one is able to unite all these factions and ensure they are now working together to achieve a common goal, it means that we have achieved a lot in building peace and unity,” Brig. Gen. Bagabo, who is RDRC commissioner in charge of Kigali said.

“The commission has achieved commendable recognition due to its approach to peace building, unity and reconciliation among Rwandans, including among those who belonged to armed groups and those that served in the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) who are now into developmental activities,” he added.

Brig. Gen. Bagabo began his narrative with the journey to demobilize and reintegrate ex-combatants into civilian



Brig. Gen. John Bagabo, commissioner at the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC)

life which he said can be clearly understood from the Rwandan history perspective.

During the 1990 liberation war, time came when there was a peace deal agreement in Arusha, Tanzania in 1993 which would necessitate joining forces between Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and FAR under a unitary government. It was unfortunate that former president [Juvénal] Habyarimana's plane was shot down and the RPF finally liberated the country, he said.

The terms of the 1993 Arusha peace talks, were implemented by the Rwanda Patriotic Front and one of them being the establishment of an agency responsible for demobilizing and reintegrating ex-combatants back to civilian life. As a consequence in 1997, the government started demobilizing RPA soldiers whereas some of the FAR had either joined RPF or fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo, he recalled.

“The aim of all these efforts was

to foster peace and security in the country as per the Arusha peace talks,” he said. The commission did not stop at demobilizing RPA soldiers from 1997 through 1998 and 2003. “During that time we started registering FAR soldiers who had not joined the national army but remained in villages and those who were serving but wanted to be demobilized and through this process we registered over 12,000 ex-combatants,” he said.

He went through a litany of actions of the demobilization process, including sensitization of ex-combatants about forming cooperatives, entrepreneurship, and financial support to ensure that they are fully equipped to start a new life.

In addition, he said that the government also embarked on providing scholarships to ex-combatants to help get them back into formal education, including primary and secondary education so that they could gain necessary skills needed in different sectors of the economy.

He also pointed to some ex-combatants who were living with physical impairment who needed special attention in addition to the financial support extended to them because they could not put it to good use as a result of their physical conditions.

“We established the medical and rehabilitation unit that specifically deals with this group of ex-combatants. It was around this time that the commission came up with the program to construct modern houses for vulnerable ex-combatants,” he said.

He recalled that the process continued till the government started retiring RDF soldiers which came as an additional program within the demobilization and reintegration commission.

As explained, ex-FAR combatants had fled the country and joined or formed armed groups that were at the forefront of destabilizing the country such as FDLR, RUD Ururuna among others. Another breakthrough for the commission has been launching a specific program to ensure those



Brig. Gen. John Bagabo speaks at a previous function

“The commission does not discriminate ex-combatants based on the former services to either RDF, FDLR or ex-FAR, since they are all Rwandans who once served and were demobilized and reintegrated back to civilian life,” Gen. Bagabo said

in armed groups peacefully return to their country. Thus, the government started mobilizing them and appealing to them to return and join the rest of ex-combatants to build their country, he said.

“Some of the ex-combatants are put under the reserve force and are engaged in various programs that are aimed at ensuring peace and security in Rwanda.”

Those demobilized include children, women, and soldiers that are physically impaired who form part of the vulnerable ex-combatants. Our support is based on the government program of economic and social statuses; such as the vulnerable who are much more considered and other Ubudehe categories, he said.

RDRC is under the Ministry of Local

government which deals with social protection.

According to the commission, vulnerability does not mean physical impairment as the commission has those physically impaired but are more economically well off, yet there are other ex-combatants who are healthy but are vulnerable and require support.

Constructing houses for demobilized soldiers is solely meant for vulnerable ex-combatants whether they are living with physical disabilities or are physically healthy. This is also in line with MINALOC programs targeting the same category of vulnerable persons.

“The commission does not discriminate ex-combatants based on the former services to either RDF, FDLR or ex-FAR, since they are all Rwandans who once served and were demobilized and reintegrated back to civilian life,” Gen. Bagabo said

The commission also provides medical assistance for ex-combatants who do not have the ability to access or acquire medical treatment.

But as the commission, we cannot get all the resources needed, what we do is to engage other stakeholders and partners such as public and private through advocacy, he said.

CHALLENGES

Gen Bagabo argued that positive results outweigh the challenges faced.



Ex-combatants who completed vocational skills training at Mutobo DC in October 2019

“Beginning from those that return from the jungles of DRC and other countries; we receive them and give them necessary support, but a few of them decide to go back to the negative forces, but still report back since they had tasted the good life in Rwanda,” he said.

“I would wish that all these people in the DRC jungles come back and help reconstruct their country instead.”

The recruitment to armed groups is mostly done through refugee camps back in Congo, but when compared to the number of people recruited and those that return to Rwanda, it is a clear sign that they do not have the capacity to withstand the level at which the refugees peacefully return.

“In addition, those who are recruited into the negative forces have given up due to the false information about Rwanda and the un-fulfillment of empty promises of leaders of armed groups,” he said.

This stance is attributed to the positive information about Rwanda, the programs the commission initiated to help ex-combatants from armed groups, the level of support and how it helps them reintegrate back to their families.

All this information, he said, reaches

those in the jungles and they pick interest in returning rather than continuing to fight unsuccessful battles.

The ex-combatants who wish to return to Rwanda find it difficult to do so due to the hindrances put forward by their leaders, according to testimonies, thus delaying the process, because they have to hide this for fear of their lives, until they are successfully repatriated.

“Those who do not want other Rwandans to return are those that were involved in crimes against humanity and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. They fear because of the crimes they committed and decide to hold captive the rest of the group members,” said Bagabo.

But still, the government has done a lot in ensuring that these people do not continue to live at large and hold refugees as captives.

He cited limited resources among the challenges to ensuring the success of the reintegration process, the construction of houses for the vulnerable ex-combatants, provision of health facilities and more financial support for all of them.

But Brig. Gen. Bagabo said he is confident the challenge would be addressed.

We hope that as resources continue to

be availed, the commission will be able to reach out to all ex-combatants, he said.

HANDLING CHILD EX-COMBATANTS

Rwandans who fled to DR Congo at a young age or those who were born from camps, when they return, the commission uses people who came back with them to locate their families and villages to help them re-unite with their family members who are in Rwanda.

There are cases where the children return but their parents remain in DR Congo.

“Most of the time, they help us identify their families more easily. But those below 18 years and have no families or do not know or remember the whereabouts of their family members, the commission continues to search for the families or reintegrate them in the Rwandan community and continue to support them as required,” the commissioner said.

“We attach them into the reserve force until they are mature enough to live independently.”

MESSAGE

To the ex-combatants who were fully reintegrated, Gen. Bagabo said it is vital for them to understand that all the support begins from the local authorities, such as construction of houses for vulnerable families, education, health facilities and other support services like agriculture.

They also have to be actively involved in government programs.

He pointed out that the door is open for those still in DR Congo jungles, fearing to return Rwanda to face justice.

“I must tell them that there is a presidential pardon. Many have returned and they have been pardoned through the same process,” he said. “I urge them to return, the country needs them, they cannot achieve their selfish motives, and Rwandans no longer want to return to insecurity.”

Miss Rwanda 2021 donates to disabled ex-combatants

Miss Rwanda 2021 Grace Ingabire has partnered with HVP Gatagara to donate various materials to ex-combatants who were disabled during the 1994 liberation struggle.

The materials, including tricycles for disabled, prosthesis equipment among other items were handed over to recipients recently in Nyarugunga village, Kicukiro district.

Handing over the donation, Ingabire commended the ex-combatants for their heroic action and sacrifice that led to the liberation of the country.

Accompanied by the management of HVP Gatagara, the visit was organized as a token of appreciation to the ex-combatants for their contribution to the country's liberation that ushered in the desired peace and security in the country.

Miss Ingabire said it is important to mobilize youth to always love their country and jealously safeguard what has been achieved.

"I planned this visit during the time Rwandans celebrated the Liberation Day 2021; but I could not come due to Covid-19 restrictions until today," she said.

She said youth recognize that the efforts by the disabled ex-combatants in the liberation of the country were not fruitless, as they are the foundation of current peace, security and economic development in Rwanda.

Talking to the ex-combatants, Miss Ingabire said that the materials she donated to them were "a sign of deep love and consideration of their selfless contribution to the country's peace and security."

"You are persons of great value in our lives, owing to your role," she said.

She also commended the management of HVP Gatagara for their partnership in obtaining the donated materials.

Jean Pierre, the representative of HVP Gatagara explained that his institution has been partnering with the RDRC, the reason it collaborated with Miss Rwanda to visit ex-combatants.

"We are pleased with this visit, we have a working relationship with RDRC in implementing various activities aimed at caring for the disabled ex-combatants. We love them in our hearts and we shall continue to give them the necessary support they need," he assured.

Brig. Gen. John Bagabo, the RDRC Commissioner in charge of the City of Kigali hailed Miss Rwanda and other past beauty pageants for their partnership with the commission, which he said shows that the youth are proud of the country's development.

He called upon the recipients of the donation to safely maintain them and to always maintain discipline in their daily lives.



Miss Rwanda 2021 Grace Ingabire (L) interacts with ex-combatants in Nyarugunga, Kicukiro district during the donation ceremony

RDRC Commissioner Mutarambirwa says ex-combatants redefining face after reintegration



Some of the RDRC beneficiaries who completed vocational skills training

Members of armed Rwandan groups harbor genocide ideologies while in DR Congo and are divided along their geographical localities in Rwanda, one of the reasons they join various outfits such as Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), RUD Urunana, the National Liberation Front (FLN) among others.

But after being demobilized and reintegrated they are living harmoniously with other Rwandans and playing a critical role in ensuring security in villages, according to the Rwanda Demobilization and

Reintegration Commission (RDRC).

“When they decide to repatriate to Rwanda from armed groups, they forget their past differences and come with a new mindset. This is also because, many of the divisive beliefs are sowed by their respective leaders and they only have to obey the rules,” Commissioner Elie Mutarambirwa, said in an interview.

“Once reintegrated in communities, they are now changed individuals who are ready to support each other in achieving their financial goals,

and collaborate with the rest of the community members to transform their communities economically.”

Ex-combatants from the DR Congo jungles and from other neighboring countries, on arrival to Rwanda, are first taken to Mutobo DC for a pre-discharge orientation program.

The program covers a series of training about the history of Rwanda, economic development, unity and reconciliation, laws governing the country, entrepreneurship and other life skills.

The time spent at Mutobo DC depends on how one was repatriated. Those who were captured and forcefully repatriated take six months to complete the training while those who voluntarily returned to Rwanda take three months.

“When they complete the training, we reintegrate them into communities where they live with other residents in villages, cells, sectors and districts. Once they reach there, they live harmoniously with the rest of the citizens, who include serving and former RDF soldiers and other categories of residents,” said Mutarambirwa.

“The ex-combatants that are reintegrated into the communities have a clear vision to work and transform their lives other than causing security threats.”

Mutarambirwa said reports have shown that some of the issues of conflicts involving ex-combatants emanate from family levels, due to land ownership and sharing which might not have considered the ex-combatants within their families.

But local leaders intervene to solve such problems within their families, without posing a security threat, he said.

According to RDRRC, ex-combatants contribute to peace and security by living harmoniously with other residents and working together to promote the country’s development.

Mutarambirwa took aim at those who fled Rwanda after taking part in 1994 genocide against Tutsi, noting that when they reached in DRC jungles, they continued to harbor negative ideologies within their camps.

He warned against falsehoods about Rwanda which he said circulates widely in refugee camps.

Many when they come out from these camps and decide to return, they are surprised to find that all the information they were told about Rwanda was false and far from the truth, he said.

They find tarmac roads and other well developed infrastructure, citizens living in harmony, everything is far



Commissioner Elie Mutarambirwa

different from the information they once shared back in DRC.

In addition, he said unity and reconciliation lessons at Mutobo DC helps the ex-combatants to live in peace with every person.

These training programs help shape both the mindset and physical readiness of ex-combatants to start a new life in their home country and forget their past and bad experience back in the Democratic Republic of Congo, he said.

“Another important factor that enables ex-combatants to adjust so quickly is their past military career. This helps them to easily conceptualize and understand the programs and the truth about Rwanda.”

According to the commissioner, once the ex-combatants are in Rwanda, they conceive positive ideas and all they need is to work together to transform their social and financial status.

While at Mutobo DC, they exhibit good morals of togetherness through eating and playing together despite their past differences.

MESSAGE

Mutarambirwa urged ex-combatants to show high discipline exhibited by soldiers and work hard to improve their standards of living.

This is because many of them wasted a lot of time in DRC and there is a need for them to work harder to attain the desired level of economic status, he said.

He also advised them to respect their leaders at various governance levels, saying leaders exist to address their concerns.

“For those still in the DRC jungles, I appeal to them to peacefully return to Rwanda, their home country because their mission is simply a waste of time which will not lead them anywhere. They should return and join the rest of the ex-combatants who are already participating in nation building,” he said.

“We have ex-combatants who have tremendously transformed their lives through income generating activities and should be emulated.”

According to RDRRC, ex-combatants contribute to peace and security by living harmoniously with other residents and working together to promote the country’s development.

Rosette Kanyera

looks to sustain family with newly acquired skills

Rosette Kanyera is about to complete a tailoring course aimed at empowering her and switching her career path at Mutobo DC.

At the center all ex-combatants take a particular trade depending on their choice aimed to help them fight unemployment after being discharged.

“The reason I decided to study tailoring at Mutobo is that this is a simple and easy way to generate income. I can use the skills acquired to make money and cater for my children,” she said.

An ex-combatant at the rank of Sergeant, Kanyera joined armed group FDLR in 1999.

She had fled Rwanda to settle in the Democratic republic of Congo.

Born in 1980 in Kayabagarura cell, Muzanze district, Kanyera joined the armed group when she was 18 years old. She recalls her life experiences as a female member of an armed group as being complicated.

“I could not get what I wanted as a woman, or get it on time. As a combatant, you do not have the exception from military operations, you follow orders. If they said we have to attack a certain target, I had to go without excuses like any other,” she said.

She added that if it meant carrying heavy equipment during war or evacuation for fear of any attack, women had to work together with their male counterparts.

This also included night security observance at their military camp.



Rosette Kanyera

DELAYED RETURN

Kanyera is among the recent ex-combatants to be repatriated from the Democratic Republic of Congo who are undergoing a pre-discharge orientation course.

She had wished to repatriate much earlier but like many others she was held back due to false information about Rwanda that used to circulate in their camps.

“We believed that if any of us returned to Rwanda, we would be executed or imprisoned. But according to what I have observed I concluded that the information was totally wrong. I have even met other people who once belonged to armed groups but are now living freely,” she said.

HOW SHE RETURNED

When Kanyera conceived, she decided to abandon armed group. Choosing

civilian life, she settled in Goma while her husband remained in the jungles. But this marked the beginning of her journey back home.

“When I gave birth in December 2019, my husband came to visit me in Goma where he was captured and repatriated to Rwanda. I decided to go to the UNHCR to process my voluntary return to Rwanda since I could not withstand living without my husband,” she said.

She finally returned to Rwanda on December 27, 2019, whereupon she was reintegrated back home with her husband’s relatives in Gakenke district.

After eight months, my husband joined me and we spent almost a month together until October 2020 when we were called to attend civic education at Mutobo DC.

She hailed Rwandan leadership that she said gives access to economic activities, and education to all its citizens without discrimination.

ACHIEVEMENTS

“Despite the fact that I was not living with my husband, within eight months, I had engaged into banana farming and I am about to harvest,” she said.

Kanyera has also started piggery in that short period. She was also given a cow under the Girinka program.

She appealed to other Rwandans still in the jungles to repatriate.

“The repatriation program is very important for ex-combatants. Back in DR Congo, there is no security; they spend nights fleeing for their lives, yet in Rwanda there is total security, people are settled and going about their own businesses,” she said.

For the women who are still in DR Congo, Kanyera advised them to change their minds and return to their home country for the sake of their children.

“Their children are missing school in DR Congo, yet they need education to secure their future,” she said.



Ex-combatants display their skills at IPRC Huye

Vocational skills confront jobs challenge among ex-combatants, dependents

With their heads bowed, young and older ex-combatants and their dependents concentrated on showcasing the special skills acquired in workshops filled with machines that will help them earn a living.

Dozens of budding ex-combatants and their dependents welders, tailors, motor vehicle mechanics and other vocational students displayed their skills.

This was during an event organized for officials of the Rwanda

Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) who toured nine Technical and Vocational Education and Training centers, where ex-combatants are enrolled.

The visits were conducted between May 17 and 21, 2021, as a means to assess how the ex-combatants are coping with the technical skills training at the centers in different parts across the country.

In addition, the visit sought to closely monitor how the ex-combatants under phases 65 and 67 with their

dependents were attending their classes, the quality of training offered to them and to identify and address the challenges faced at the training centers.

The vocational skills are offered to ex-combatants and their dependents as part of a drive to confront unemployment.

RDRC has reached a memorandum of understanding with nine certified vocational schools in different provinces of the country to provide vocational skills to ex-combatants

and their dependents because it provides better job prospects.

IPRC Huye, one of the selected vocational schools, has up to 23 ex-combatants pursuing a six-month welding course.

The students are among demobilized ex-combatants under the 65th phase.

The youths and mid aged men demonstrated their skills in welding, displaying confidence that their future would be bright.

Venant Uzabakiriho, one of the students training in welding from Tumba sector in Huye district, said he looks to have a better life compared to their previous lifestyle back in DR Congo.

His dream is to open own welding and metal fabrication workshop after completing the training program, explaining that the country needs welders in its construction industry.

Jean Paul Nyirimana, another welding student, explained that the training he received while at Mutobo DC was a turning point in his life.

His plans since being demobilized are to change his life for the better and work towards inclusive development of the country.

Rtd. Sgt Major Moise Mbarushimana, a student representative at IPRC and a former FDLR combatant from Huye district, said upon repatriation he realized how Rwanda is secure with hardworking citizens, which gave him confidence in their future.

Mbarushimana, 46, said he expects the technical skills acquired to help him create own job.

He noted that the financial support extended to them by RDRC offered a good start for them to build on and transform their lives.

Mr Francis Musoni, the RDRC Secretary General, assured the students that the vocational skills will help them find suitable jobs or create their own.



Ex-combatants in a workshop at IPRC Huye

He urged the ex-combatants to devote themselves to ensure they become successful in not only completing these training but also use the acquired skills to uplift themselves from poverty.

Mr Musoni promised the students that once the training is completed, RDRC would provide them with work kits based on their fields of study to put in practice their skills for income generation.

He advised the ex-combatants to form cooperatives to strengthen their saving scheme as a team which could be expanded into factories.

The RDRC Commissioner in charge of Southern Province, David Munyurangabo, called on the ex-combatants to observe discipline at school, work hard and remain accountable when using RDRC equipment that would be donated to them after the training.

He also advised them to learn to find solutions to their challenges since the government has already accorded them preliminary support.

Information from the RDRC shows that ex-combatants who enrolled in technical education have been able to establish their own income generating projects and they are able to meet their family needs compared to the previous period before introducing technical training for them.

Since 2006 RDRC introduced the

Vulnerability Support Window to ex-combatants who had been reintegrated back to communities, but had remained poorer despite the financial support.

The Vulnerability Support Window is intended to enable ex-combatants enroll back to schools, technical skills training and to ensure they start income generating activities basing on their fields of choice.

DON BOSCO NYAMAGABE

Meanwhile, at Don Bosco Nyamagabe TVET School in Nyamagabe district Southern Province, 37 students including ex-combatants and their dependents are studying tailoring and motor vehicle mechanics.

The RDRC team held meetings with the school management and the beneficiaries about various issues, including the quality of training, challenges faced and the study environment.

The team also conducted a tour of the training facilities used by the ex-combatants.

The progress and skills so far acquired were found to be impressive, according to testimonies from beneficiaries.

Eight students undertaking motor vehicle mechanics displayed skills so far acquired by demonstrating to the visiting delegation how faulty motor vehicle engines are repaired.

After touring the garage, the delegation proceeded to meet 29 tailoring students, who also showcased their skills in knitting skirts and face masks that are used to prevent the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

RDRC delegation appreciated how the students were being trained and their fast-paced learning abilities to acquire such skills within four weeks of study.

The students assured the visiting team that they would use the skills acquired to start income generating activities.

JEAN DE DIEU NSENGIYUMVA, 22, a former child ex-combatant, said he was ready to apply the motor vehicle mechanical skills to earn a living.

The 22-year-old was conscripted in the FDLR armed group at the age of 14 back in 2013 while in DR Congo.

After his return to Rwanda, RDRC facilitated him to integrate back to his family in Kibirizi sector in Nyamagabe district, from where he came to attend vocational training at Don Bosco TVET School.

He recalled that back in DR Congo they spent most of their valuable time either fighting or fleeing from fighting in the jungles.

“I was a child then living a difficult life. I thank the Rwandan government

for granting us the opportunity to return. I cannot get enough words to express my gratitude to RDRC for all it has done for us ever since we arrived in Rwanda on November 27, 2018,” he said.

Upon their repatriation, RDRC provided them with necessary assistance, including the facilitation to go back to school.

“This is something valuable as it would give us employable skills to be able to start economic activities so that we can take care of our families,” Nsengiyumva said.

SYLVAIN MUTABAZI, 20, joined the TVET School from Kamegeri sector in Nyamagabe, where he was staying with his father -- an ex-combatant from FDLR living with physical disability.

He was repatriated from Kanyabayonga camp in DR Congo together with his parents under phase 65 in 2018.

Like other students, Mutabazi is confident that the motor vehicle mechanics skills he has acquired would be useful to his family.

The father of three is optimistic that within six months of training, he would have acquired enough skills that he will use to get employment and cater for his family.

His long term plan is to construct own house.

EMERANCE MUKANDORI, 40, explains that after she left Congo in 2019, she is living a dignified life unlike previously.

She enrolled for a tailoring course as a dependent of Rtd. Sgt Byukusenge Noheri, 47, a former FDLR ex-combatant.

“Tailoring is a life skill that is why I put in a lot of effort to learn every aspect of it such as sewing dresses and skirts. Once this course is completed, my plan is to start a tailoring business to be able to financially support my family of eight,” she said.

Before enrolling for training, Mukandori like others had received financial support worth Rwf300,000 from RDRC, which she used to construct a house in Cyanika sector in Nyamagabe district.

“I thank the RDRC and the school management for the love and care they have showed us, giving us quality food, drinks, and our learning needs,” she explained.

Rtd. Sgt Joel Ntakirutimana, an Ex FAR ex-combatant, is another beneficiary of the technical skills training.

The 49-year-old from Mushubi Sector in Nyamagabe district was demobilized after attending pre-discharge orientation program at Mutobo DC in 2004 under phase six.

He said he saw it as a wonderful opportunity to be considered for tailoring training.

He hopes that tailoring will help him in a number of ways; after completing the training.

“I will start my own sewing business and earn money which I will use to meet my family needs and pay school fees for my three children. I also plan to expand my piggery business which I started with four pigs bought using the money I received from RDRC,” he noted.



Ex-combatants in class at IPRC Huye

A turning point for Mugenzi and wife



Jean Mugenzi, an ex-combatant with his family

Jean Mugenzi, an ex-combatant from the FDLR armed group, has a straightforward story:

He was born in Rwanda but at the age of 15, he fled the country to neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, more than 20 years ago, where he joined the armed group.

He has bitter memories of life in DR Congo while serving under the FDLR in Rucuru zone, where he says life was hard. They had to contend with hunger and insecurity that kept them on the toes.

“Often our camp was raided by the Congolese army (FRDC) which made life complicated, many of us were killed while others sustained serious injuries,” he said.

Mugenzi joined FDLR combatants in 1998 when he was only 19 years old, finally returning home in 2018.

The 42-year-old has since returned to Rwanda and resettled at Mageragere sector in Nyarugenge district together with his wife and two children.

The father of two explained that ever since he joined the armed group, he deeply thought about returning to Rwanda. But his superiors always threatened him that he would be killed

on return.

“I used to think about returning because of the radio programs I followed about peace and stability in Rwanda, but our commanders could tell lies about Rwanda, that it was not safe to return. This was the main reason we spent many years in the jungle,” he said.

Mugenzi says his journey to return began at the time he fell ill and his commanders barred him from seeking treatment. He was instead transferred to Kanyabayonga camp protected by the UN Mission in DR Congo (MONUSCO).

The FDLR used to send the injured soldiers to the camp, claiming it was their waiting place as the leaders pushed

for peace talks with the Rwandan government for a peaceful return.

“The truth of the matter was that there were no such negotiations in the offing. Those who were sent to the Kanyabayonga camp were discarded fighters not able to continue armed rebellion. They were mainly the weak, sick, injured or physically disabled plus children and women,” Mugenzi said.

He added that at the camp, he met with other Rwandan refugees protected by MONUSCO who took care of him and treated his ailment. It was also during that time that he started receiving good news about Rwanda and, like everybody else at the camp, he was ready to repatriate.

MONUSCO used to sensitize the group about voluntary repatriation and prepared them.

Unfortunately, at some point in time, armed groups raided the camp, looting all the property of MONUSCO and the refugees.

The occupants who waited repatriation were also left empty-handed until the UN refugee agency UNHCR came to their rescue.

“What befell us was unspeakable. The attackers left us empty-handed after looting all that we had, including shoes, clothes and bags,” Mugenzi explained.

“Following the raid we accelerated our demand for repatriation to Rwanda, and a few days later, we were facilitated to return through the Goma border when most of us were barefooted.”

At Goma, Mugenzi and others were received by the Rwandan authorities and driven in buses to Mutobo DC in Musanze district for pre-discharge orientation training.



Jean Mugenzi and his wife



Jean Mugenzi's farm

SURPRISES

"After arriving at Mutobo, we were all afraid of what could happen to us next; thoughts of being killed on arrival lingered. But it was not the case. We received a warm welcome. The Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission staff gave us everything we needed such as water, new clothes, food, accommodation and medication to some of the members who were sick," he said.

In the meantime, Mugenzi's wife Marie Claire Mukamusonera and children were transferred to Nyanza and Nyarushishi transit centers.

At Mutobo, Mugenzi and other ex-combatants started a pre-discharge orientation course, covering lessons on Rwandan history, entrepreneurship, unity and reconciliation, among others.

The ex-combatants are taught about the sources of discrimination and divisions among Rwandans, the causes of 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and how it was stopped.

They also receive training on entrepreneurship and how they can engage in economic activities to transform their lives.

REINSERTION

Mugenzi and wife live happily after starting a new life in Nyarugenge district.

They have embarked on economic activities aimed at transforming their lives and to contribute to the development of the country.

"We are into agriculture, practicing crop and livestock farming. We rear cattle and pigs which have all yielded positive results. We use the money generated

from farming to pay school fees for our children in good schools which we had not attained 24 years ago while living in the DR Congo jungles," he said.

Mugenzi said that they have embraced government programs and are ready to work with other Rwandans for national development.

He regretted having participated in subversive activities against the government of national unity and his time wasted in the jungles.

Mugenzi, and family were among the group of ex-combatants who were repatriated to Rwanda in 2018 by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) from DR Congo jungles through Goma.

Speaking from their home in Mageragere, Mugenzi explained that from Mutobo, they were warmly welcomed by residents, relatives and the local leadership.

They received clothing and foodstuffs to kickstart their new life in Rwanda.

He believes those who spread false information about Rwanda were Genocide suspects who are afraid of being brought to justice once they return.

He has received a resettlement package from RDRC to enable him start a new and changed life.

"Like any other person in the group, I was first given Rwf60,000. I used to buy utensils, mattresses, food and other basic items," he said.

The RDRC later extended to him Rwf320,000 in two installments which he used to start some income generating activities.

He used the money to buy five goats, which have now multiplied to nine.

He has constructed his own house using the money from RDRC and support of the neighbours in terms of labour.

He grows vegetables and other crops like yams and cassava which have all worked to change his family's welfare.

I have no problem with food insecurity in my family, he said, adding that they live happily as a family with enough food to eat.

Two of his children are all enrolled at school, one in Primary Two while the second one has joined an early childhood development center.

Mugenzi's wife Marie Claire Mukamusonera with whom they got married in 2008 while in DR Congo expressed her happiness about the kind of reception they received upon reaching the transit center.

I got all I needed, including food and medical care for my two children until I was resettled in Mgeragere, she said.

"We have joined cooperatives in Mageragere through which we hope to make a financial breakthrough. I extend my appreciation to the Government of Rwanda and the good leadership for giving us an opportunity to return home," she said.

"When I remember life in DR Congo, I believe that I could not have made it back without the Rwandan government."

The Executive Secretary of Mageragere Sector, Christophe Ntirushwa, said Mugenzi's family is a model one in the area.

"We jointly work together in all government programs. They recently formalized their marriage in the sector. As local leaders we support the family to develop. We have donated a modern heifer to the family to be able to get milk and manure under the Girinka program," he explained.

The couple advises those who are still holed up in the DR Congo jungles to return to Rwanda and participate in economic activities to support their families and the country instead of wasting time on unnecessary rebellion in a foreign country.

David Nderabahizi:

Returning to Rwanda was a dream fulfilled



David Nderabahizi

Seated in a plastic chair, David Nderabahizi speaks softly but with a beaming smile, perhaps understandably, the smile of being home at last.

The 58-year-old ex-combatant, who we met at Mutobo DC, is strong-willed and confident with the new life's journey he has started. He sees no obstacle at all between his past and his reintegration.

Nderabahizi was born in Gataraga sector in Musanze district. He left Rwanda as an EX-FAR soldier and settled in Mugunga refugee camp in Democratic Republic of Congo.

“I wish I belonged to the same group as General [Paul] Rwarakabije; I could have repatriated with him a long time ago. I imagined spending my entire life in the jungle and I could not bear this. So returning to Rwanda was my thoughtful dream fulfilled.”

The father of two had been in DR Congo jungles ever since he left Rwanda, where he served in separate Rwandan armed groups, including FDLR and its splinter group CNRD.

Nderabahizi had decided to retire from FDLR in favour of doing own businesses but it was not long after that he joined CNRD.

“At first I refused to join but for my own security, I had to join the group in November 2019 at a place called Kananira,” he recalled.

Thereafter, the group relocated to Karehe in South Kivu but while there it was surrounded by the Congolese army (FRDC).

“We decided to retreat to Kawuzi forests when the FRDC started advancing towards our military camp. Since I was tired of fighting, I surrendered to the FRDC,” he said.

Together with others, the FRDC kept them at Nyamunyunya military barracks until they were repatriated to Rwanda in December 2019.

On reaching Rwanda, they were taken to Mukamira transit center, before being transferred to Mutobo DC in January 2020.

At Mukamira, the group received urgent assistance that included medical care, clothing and food.

On the day he received information about planned repatriation to Rwanda, Nderabahizi said he was not afraid because he had already made up his mind to return.

“I wish I belonged to the same group as General [Paul] Rwarakabije; I could have repatriated with him a long time ago. I imagined spending my entire life in the jungle and I could not bear this. So returning to Rwanda was my thoughtful dream fulfilled,” he said.

Way back in 2009, Nderabahizi said he had attempted to return home but it required him to travel for four days to reach MONUSCO (UN Mission in DR Congo), so given his poor health then, he could not afford it.

LIFE IN THE JUNGLE

According to Nderabahizi, life in the jungle is very difficult and there are not enough words that one can use to describe it.

“Living as a foreigner in the jungle of another country is very dangerous. Besides deadly wars and lack of income, there is lack of access to medical facilities which puts more lives in danger,” he said.

He regretted not having been able to properly plan for his children in terms of education and primary healthcare.

“There is no time to settle and concentrate on economic activities even with the little time you may have, even if you did, you will not be able to reap from it due to uncertainty posed by the FRDC,” he said.

DELAYED DECISION TO SURRENDER

Nderabahizi contends that while he repatriated voluntarily, the decision to surrender is not something that simply comes to the mind of a combatant, without having enough information from where one wants to go.

In the DR Congo, they could get mixed information about Rwanda. While some encouraged them to return to Rwanda others dissuaded them with contradicting reports, which made them skeptical.

“It was very difficult to get credible information about the security situation in Rwanda to guarantee our safety,” he said.

In addition, Nderabahizi said some people in Europe could lie to the fighters about the progress of the fighting, assuring them that they were destined to win the war or enter into serious peace talks sooner than later.

Such misinformation combined to misguide armed group members from surrendering to authorities.

Additionally, misinformation emanated from Christians who reportedly carried God’s message to fighters.

“I am ready to work and work with fellow Rwandans to promote development in my community, using the entrepreneurship training and skills received.”

“The training on unity and reconciliation and treatment received by ex-combatants from various armed groups bears testimony. It is the hallmark of true reconciliation I hope to carry forward.”

“They could tell us that the war was about to end and we were to defeat the Rwandan government, with such information, it was very difficult for someone to surrender since he/she was sure God’s message was truthful,” he said.

HOW HE WAS RECEIVED IN RWANDA

Nderabahizi said they were well received at Mutobo under phase 67, provided with food, clothing and medical care for those who had some injuries and ill-health.

Nderabahizi said listening to news over radio stations about Rwanda through the popular radio program “Isange mubanyu” where they used to bring people that they knew very well, including family members, played a critical role in their return.

Some family members used to share reassuring messages.

“When I reached Mutobo DC, my family celebrated because no one could have ever thought I would be back in Rwanda. It was like a miracle for me and my family to return safely

home. Deep inside I felt I had returned to normal life and sincerely waited for the government programs,” he said.

Besides civic education, Rwandan history, and reconciliation programs, the ex-combatants also undertake life skills training during the pre-discharge orientation.

There are various vocational trades such as tailoring, hair dressing, construction as well as farming.

REINTEGRATION

Nderabahizi expressed readiness to live peacefully with his family and other Rwandans.

“I am ready to work and work with fellow Rwandans to promote development in my community, using the entrepreneurship training and skills received,” he said.

Nderabahizi believes if Rwandans were united the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in which more than a million people were killed, the tragedy could have been avoided.

“The training on unity and reconciliation and treatment received by ex-combatants from various armed groups bears testimony. It is the hallmark of true reconciliation I hope to carry forward.”

He commended the Rwandan government for letting members of armed groups return home.

“Not all governments can accept to reintegrate ex-combatants into the army or civilian life, but look, they have accommodated us and helped us to change our lives for better,” he said.

“Besides, we were put under the reserve force to be able to provide assistance should the country face insecurity challenges, this is a sign that we are part of a larger security unit in Rwanda, which we least expected.”

To those who still remain holed up in DR Congo, Nderabahizi indicated they are now very weak, to keep on fighting. The best advice for them is to surrender and return to their home country peacefully, he said.

Armed group leaders 'spread falsehoods to discourage defections'



Corporal (Rtd.) Iranzi JMV

Leaders of Rwandan armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo abetted falsehoods against Rwanda to deliberately subvert voluntary repatriations, according to ex-combatants.

"The leaders used to tell us discouraging information about our mother land since we did not know much about it. Some of the discouraging information was life threatening that one who returns to Rwanda was immediately killed," Corp

"We lived in that fear and we could not return since we feared for our lives. Life was terrible in the jungle, leaving us yearning for change."

Jean Marie Vianney Iranzi said.

"We lived in that fear and we could not return since we feared for our lives. Life was terrible in the jungle, leaving us yearning for change."

The 23-year-old was born in DR Congo. His parents hail from Ruhango district.

He joined the armed group in 2018 at the age of 20.

It all started after his father, an Ex-Far Sergeant Major Iminsiriyo Afari died in the Congolese capital Kinshasa while he was still a student.

"After his death, I remained with relatives who belonged to armed groups till today. When I reached Senior Six they told me to join an armed group to support others since they needed more manpower," he said.

Iranzi does not have any siblings. His mother returned to Rwanda in 2000 and currently lives in Ruhango district.

He recalled that life in the jungle was very complicated.

"We were always sweating to eat, and living a mobile lifestyle under constant fear and uncertainty."

He felt happiness on returning to his country, saying Congolese citizens were not hospitable.

He is now assured of security and individual development.

"I will use my valuable time to concentrate on things that can generate income for me and secure my future. I want to learn vehicle mechanics and driving as these two will help me to get employment much more easily and live a better life," he said.

"I am prepared to embrace government programs including unity and reconciliation, working with the rest of Rwandans to build Rwanda."

Telesphore Karangwa says life in armed rebellion cheated him



Sergeant Telesphore Karangwa

When Sergeant Telesphore Karangwa fled Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi to the Democratic Republic of Congo, his troubles started.

He could not engage in economic activities such as farming, or business. His family was ostracized and none of his five children was enrolled in school.

Karangwa, 57, from Huye district in the former Rusatira sector, lived in DR Congo refugee camps until the camps were disbanded, forcing him to join the FDLR armed group.

After decades of struggle, he felt he had had enough, and one morning in 2015, he quit the armed group.

"I decided to quit the armed group because I had lost interest and hope in

the future of my family. It was a total loss for me and my children to remain under FDLR," he said.

His children have since enrolled in Rwandan schools.

Karangwa recalls that joining the FDLR was not out of conviction but persuasion as he lived near the FDLR wing that took care of the injured soldiers.

The leaders asked him to join and help provide assistance to the sick members of the armed group.

"They convinced me several times and assured me that once the injured were healed I would be allowed to go back to civilian life, but they did not keep their word," he said.

The father of five is among the recent

returnees from DR Congo.

His wife and children have been reintegrated in his home village in Huye.

Even with the little time he had spent in Rwanda, he realized a lot of changes had taken place in the country in terms of infrastructure and other economic aspects.

"In 1994 when we were fleeing the country, we went through the Rusizi border post but we could hardly recognize the place when we returned," Karangwa said.

"When compared to the time then, many things have changed for better in terms of social and economic development, with magnificent structures, roads ...you could mistake Rusizi for Kigali, the capital," he said, adding that while in DR Congo it was not possible for one to sleep uninterrupted.

There is total security in Rwanda," Karangwa said.

He expressed his readiness to embrace government development programs.

On falsehoods about Rwanda, he said that there was a lot of misinformation circulating among Rwandans that are still in DR Congo jungles.

He added that with the help of his friends who had earlier returned, he managed to get credible information that enabled him to return to his mother land.

On arrival in Rusizi district, the government gave them preliminary assistance, such as food and medication to those who needed it pending their transfer to Mutobo DC.

"I plan to work with the rest of Rwandans to develop my country. At Mutobo I want to learn entrepreneurship skills which can help me to change my life for the better."

Fidel Nsanzimana

happy to be home, regrets time wasted in jungles

A former member of the CNRD armed group operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo is hoping to begin a new life after repatriating from the jungles.

Col Fidel Nsanzimana says he regrets the time wasted in rebellion.

The 50-year-old arrived at Mutobo DC in July 2020 for a pre-discharge orientation training, from Karehe in DR Congo through Rubavu district.

He voluntarily returned home after engaging Rwandan authorities, two years after quitting armed groups.

“A person in an armed rebellion has much more to regret about, especially participating in causing insecurity to destroy other people’s efforts to develop their country,” he said.

“I regret having taken part in such activities that might have affected the economic development of my country.”

The EX-FAR fighter joined armed groups in DR Congo in 1997, serving under the FDLR before joining its splinter group CNRD.

“I served under CNRD, but I took a decision to quit on March 8, 2018, because of some misunderstandings within the management on recruitment of child soldiers,” Nsanzimana said.

“They wanted to recruit my own children, those of our fellow fighters and refugees, but I was opposed to the decision which was much similar to that of the FDLR and the major reason we split.”

He said from that time, he started living a civilian life until his eventual return to Rwanda.



Col Fidel Nsanzimana

After quitting, Nsanzimana worked with the UN at Rubaya area but he had already made up his mind to repatriate for what he said was for his personal safety and family’s future.

“I hoped to begin a new life and work for my family, there was no future in the jungles. I needed to embark on economic activities that would help me revamp my economic status and cater for my children,” he said.

He recalls that Rwandan authorities helped him to process his peaceful return.

He was advised to go to Goma, where he was picked up from.

“Life was not easy at all back in DR Congo, I had to hide from CNRD, FDLR and Congolese army (FRDC), returning to Rwanda was the only best choice,” he said.

FAMILY LIFE

The father of four hails from Nyamagabe district in Southern Province.

Before the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, he had studied up to A-level (A2) graduating in nursing, and had completed one year of study at the University of Rwanda in the Faculty of Medicine when he fled Rwanda.

He now plans to take part in different development programs hoping to catch up for lost time.

“I need to put more effort and work harder to change my current economic status,” he said.

Nsanzimana added that he was happy to repatriate, and had no fears of returning.

A familiar person arranged his return, and was very helpful.

“We had been together once in DR Congo and finding them home was reassuring to me,” he said.

At Mutobo, Nsanzimana is pursuing electrical engineering training which he believes would help him get jobs or create his own employment once discharged.

“This is also in line with the government’s plan to distribute electricity to all Rwandan citizens, as someone who has skills, I am confident that I will get employed,” he said.

He appealed to those still in DR Congo to reflect before they could continue their “wrong mission.”

“They should return home instead of wasting their lives in fighting unnecessary wars in DR Congo against the Rwandan government. There is no reason why Rwandans should think about overthrowing a government which has given people equal opportunities,” he said.

“They should return and concentrate on the development of their families and shape their children’s future. There are many opportunities in Rwanda such as TVET, farming, businesses... there is a lot they can do here other than involving in a futile exercise.”

It is not too late to switch career, says Barakamfitiye



Sergeant Major, Barakamfitiye Providence

At the rank of Sergeant Major, Barakamfitiye Providence, 42, a mother of four, is among many Rwandans who were repatriated from the Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2019 and currently under civic training in Mutobo rehabilitation center.

A former resident of Rambura sector in Nyabihu district, Providence narrates that as a rebel fighter under CNRD, her return from the DRC came as a result of FRDC military operations that captured and eventually handed them over to the Rwanda Defence Forces. She said that she did not have a chance to return home with her husband who she says she was separated from during a fierce fighting.

Reiterating on the dangers of being a woman soldier, Providence noted that it is a very complicated task that requires physical strength, as a woman it is not easy to cope up with the task.

Asked about her military journey, she replied that she had spent a long time

in active military services since 1997 while under the infamous insurgency that characterized the period after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. She recalls that due to the insecurity in the country at the time, she decided to join insurgents so that she could secure her life.

After a defeat by the RDF, they decided to relocate to DRC where she experienced hard times as a woman soldier until the day she was captured and handed over to the Rwandan government.

“Upon return to Rwanda, we were welcomed by the government with well prepared transport vehicles at the border post that we used to go to Nyarushishi rehabilitation center,” Providence said.

“At Nyarushishi center, we were given initial assistance that included medical treatment, clothing and food to ensure that our lives are restored.

After two weeks, we were relocated to Mutobo center where we would follow training sessions before reintegrating to our communities.”

LIFE BACK IN RWANDA

Providence explains that her life and the four children – the eldest of which has just entered teenage life – have been well catered for by the Rwandan government. They have and continue to receive food reliefs, clothing, and medical treatment for those that fall sick.

She also noted that she had fears of where she was heading since it was the foreign army that had captured them and none of the group knew exactly what would follow their fatal defeat in DRC, but when she learned that they were to be handed over to the Rwandan government, she saw herself starting a new life. She said that always had dreams about returning to Rwanda resulting from deep thoughts, which had been fulfilled.

SKILLS LEARNED

I have learned many activities, including construction skills. I decided to learn construction because of the current infrastructural development in the country, as someone with necessary construction skills required, it could be easy to either get employment or start my own business in the same sector.

MESSAGE

“The repatriation and reintegration of former ex-combatants and rebels back to their home country, and help them to start a new life is a good program, it portrays a positive image of the country at an international scene,” Providence said.

“I must confess that I take this as a major milestone for people like me to integrate into a new and changed life.

“For those still in DRC, I must tell them that they are wasting their time in the jungles; Rwanda is a good country with good leadership. I advise them to return home without fear of their lives and join hands with the rest of Rwandans to build their country.”

Nyagatare Transit Center

facilitating smooth transition of Ex-AGs and dependents



Nyagatare Transit Center in Rusizi district is enabling smooth transition of ex-combatants and their dependents repatriated from DR Congo to Rwanda.

According to Patrick Gatete, a staff at the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC)

in charge of receiving ex-combatants repatriated from Democratic Republic of Congo in Rusizi district, the transit center located in Gihundwe sector receives those entering through Rusizi border post.

From the center, ex-combatants receive preparatory training and

rehabilitation before they are transferred to Mutobo DC for pre-discharge orientation.

The center receives men and women ex-combatants and their dependents.

Recently, the center had a total of eight ex-combatants with 12 dependents



that included four women and eight children.

Gatete explained that since January this year, about 48 ex-combatants including three women ex-combatants had transited through the center.

The ex-combatants are transferred to Mutobo DC while their dependents are reintegrated back to their respective families in the Rwandan community, said Gatete.

The women get financial assistance equivalent to Rwf60,000 in cash to help them buy basic needs such as food, utensils, clothes, that they may require to easily resettle in their families.

Gatete explained that before they are transferred to Mutobo, they are given necessary assistance in the form of food, medical treatment.

In addition, they attend preliminary sensitization workshops on government programs.

The center offers recreational activities such as volleyball and football to ex-combatants.

In terms of health services, the center works jointly with Gihundwe Hospital to give medical treatment to those with different ailments as well as those with psychological issues.

Besides, the center also receives child

ex-combatants who receive support like their elder counterparts before they are transferred to a rehabilitation center.

The dependents are given time to undergo skills training geared at enabling them to have necessary skills for self-development.

“Their perception about Rwanda while in DR Congo is that they are always misinformed about the country, but when they cross the border into the country, and we warmly welcome them, all the fear that they previously harbored goes with time,” said Gatete.

“They begin to break the silence and share with us how they lost their valuable time in DR Congo based on false information from their superiors.”

Gatete advises those who are still in DR Congo jungles to voluntarily return to their home country and get required support to ensure smooth reintegration back to the Rwandan community.

“It is also important for them to come and participate in the development of the country like other Rwandans,” he said.



Ex-combatants tell of comforting moments of new Bumbogo homes



Alexandre Muhire is a long way from the fear of receiving eviction notices that characterized his family life after being demobilized from the army.

An ex-combatant living with physical disability, Muhire said that after being demobilized in 1997, he mismanaged his sendoff package and ended up living an unhappy life, renting from house to house and started looking for other jobs.

Ever since Muhire and his wife Angelique Mukanoheri were resettled in what is now their permanent home in Mukuyu village in Bumbogo sector in Gasabo district, the calmness is comforting.

At some point he worked as a prison warden and a security guard with a security company in town, which was not easy for him.

“It was not easy for me to raise money to cater for my family as a person living with physical disability caused by bullet fragments during the liberation struggle,” he said.

“I could not afford rent, landlords used to give me eviction notices every time, but I thank Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) for giving me a chance to own my own house, where I live with my wife and children.”

He said that after getting his own house, he decided to resign from the security guard job due to his physical status since the main reason he

“It was not easy for me to raise money to cater for my family as a person living with physical disability caused by bullet fragments during the liberation struggle.”



pushed himself so hard was to raise money to pay his monthly rent.

Muhire's wife Angelique Mukanoheri said that she was very happy to receive their own house, which has raised their status and given them a settled mind as opposed to life they lived in rented houses, where landlords could write to them eviction notices from time to time.

Muhire is one of the 30 Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) ex-combatants living with physical disabilities who were resettled in Bumbogo by RDRC.

The houses are fully furnished with basic furniture, beddings, and kitchenware with a water tank.

In the same village, the RDRC constructed a house for RPA ex-combatants with special cases such as those with advanced age and veterans with mental problems that need close attention.

The homes have saved them the hardships of renting that was characterized by frequent movements in search for cheaper houses.

They express their gratitude to the leadership of President Paul Kagame, for his continued support towards improving their social and economic lives.

In Mukuyu village there are 22 modern houses each with the capacity of accommodating two families (2-in-one).

The houses are meant to accommodate 44 families of RPA ex-combatants who got physical disabilities during the liberation struggle.

In the same village, the RDRC constructed a house for RPA ex-combatants with special cases such as those with advanced age and veterans with mental problems that need close attention.

This enables the government to closely look after them more easily.

Beneficiaries said that getting their own houses was a clear indication that the government remembers their valuable contribution to the liberation of the country.



Rubavu residents donate cows, other items to Kicukiro disabled ex-combatants



Local leaders from Kanama sector in Rubavu district donated nine cows, five tons of Irish potatoes and 700 liters of milk to disabled ex-combatants living in Nyarugunga sector in Kicukiro district in Kigali city.

According to the executive secretary of Kanama sector Honore Mugisha, the donation to 59 families of disabled ex-combatants was collected by sector residents as a means of appreciation for their invaluable role in liberating the country.

The cows will be kept at the Rwanda

“It is a great pleasure to see that people can think about us; this is a commendable action that has touched our hearts. It has shown us that the contribution of disabled ex-combatants to liberate the country is well appreciated and highly valued by all.”

Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) farm at Mutobo DC, from where they would be brought to Kanombe farm towards the end of 2021 when there is enough grass to feed them.

Mugisha said that the residents recognize the positive contribution of disabled liberation fighters and that the idea of giving them a token of appreciation came from residents.

RDRC Human Resources Manager Wilson Wamala said seeing farmers share their agricultural yields with ex-combatants was impressive.

"It is a great pleasure to see that people can think about us; this is a commendable action that has touched our hearts. It has shown us that the contribution of disabled ex-combatants to liberate the country is well appreciated and highly valued by all," he said

Jean Paul Ngenzi, one of the residents of Kanama sector and the managing

The cows will be kept at the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) farm at Mutobo DC, from where they would be brought to Kanombe farm towards the end of 2021 when there is enough grass to feed them.

director of Agruni company, thanked his fellow residents who donated to the disabled ex-combatants.

"I am happy to meet again with my comrades who were injured during the liberation war, some of whom I lifted and helped through after being shot. I thank them for the strong spirit and determination they had during that difficult time. Thinking and supporting you was always in our hearts," Ngenzi, also a liberation fighter said.

The leaders on both sides also visited Mutobo farm, where the cows would be kept.

Jules Karigirwa, who represented other recipients of the donation, thanked Kanama sector residents for the "great love and support they extended to them."

Milk donation signifies peace, he said, explaining that part of the donation would be shared with their neighbors.

He also noted the ex-combatants have no regrets for their disabilities since they attained their goal of restoring peace and security in Rwanda.

Lt. Col. JMV Munyampundu Kayitera, the representative of reserve forces in Kicukiro district said that the donation signified respect and value attached to the contribution of disabled ex-combatants towards the country's liberation in 1994.

Olivier Ruhamyambuga, the executive secretary of Rubavu district commended the soldiers who liberated the country, sacrificing their own lives to ensure Rwanda achieved peace.

He reassured that the good spirit demonstrated by Rubavu residents would continue.

Genevieve Uwamahoro, the executive secretary of Nyarugunga sector also expressed her appreciation to the leaders from Rubavu district and Kanama sector residents for their friendly gesture.

"We thank you for the loving heart; it is of great value to recognize the role of disabled ex-combatants during the liberation war. We promise that we shall share with you the yields from the seed of love you have sown today," she said.





RWANDA DEMOBILIZATION AND REINTEGRATION COMMISSION/PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

The Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) was created in 1997 by a Cabinet decision and approved by a Presidential Decree No.37/01 of 09/04/2002 instituting the Commission in order to support the design, implementation and administration of the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Programme. The presidential Decree has been repealed by the Law N°50/2015 of 14/12/2015 establishing Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission and determining its responsibilities, organisation and functioning.

CONTACTS

P.O. Box 7227 Kigali Rwanda [East Africa]

Phone: + 250 587159

Fax: +250 587160

Email: demobrwanada@yahoo.com
demob@rdrc.org.rw

www.demobrwanada.gov.rw

MISSION

The overall mission of RDRC is to facilitate the reinsertion and reintegration of the former military member to empower him/her to develop him/herself and contribute to the comprehensive development of the country.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- To receive and carry out social reinsertion and reintegration of former members of Rwanda Defence Forces placed at its disposal by the relevant organ;
- To receive, demobilise and carry out social reinsertion and reintegration of the persons referred to in items 2o b. and 2o c. of Article 2 of this Law;
- To advocate for the initiatives meant for former military members with disability and follow up the implementation of such initiatives;
- To advise the Government on the policy of demobilization, social reinsertion and reintegration of former military members;
- To coordinate the actions of all Government organs and all stakeholders working with RDRC on matters related to the demobilization and the reinsertion and reintegration of former military members;
- To carry out such other activities as may be required for the achievement of its mission